

Change: *A competitive world has two possibilities for you. You can lose. Or, if you want to win, you can change.*
—Lester C. Thurow, American economist

Unique relationship covers public works functions

Full-service partnership developed

Story by Paul Levesque

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Rock Island Arsenal and the Rock Island District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have joined in a partnership that is the first, but probably not the last, of its kind in the Army.

Under the partnership, the Rock Island District will take over the day-to-day operation of most of the functions now performed by RIA's Directorate of Public Works. The Arsenal commander will retain responsibility for planning, programming, budgeting, funding and setting priorities for public works requirements on the installation.

The partnership officially took effect on Oct. 1 and will continue on a test basis through fiscal years 1998 and 1999. At the conclusion of the test, the move of PW functions to the Corps could become permanent.

The success or failure of the test will be tracked very closely by the Department of the Army, which is considering the idea of turning public works functions at all Army installations over to the Corps of Engineers.

While two other installations are testing public works partnerships on a limited basis, RIA can claim to be the only installation testing a full partnership with the Corps.

In remarks delivered at a ceremony marking the partnership, Rock Island District commander Col. James Mudd described it as a "brave effort" that would require a lot of trust and cooperation on both sides.

"I believe this partnership has a really good chance to succeed," Mudd said, "because of the hard work and dedicated effort of the people involved in it."

RIA commander Col. Steven Roop admitted that he was skeptical about the partnership at first but agreed to it when he realized its implications for the future of the Arsenal and the Army.

"This is our chance to be part of setting a new policy, rather than reacting to a policy imposed on us," Roop remarked.

Dan Holmes of the Rock Island District, who is serving as the district's primary liaison with the Arsenal, said that the partnership shared similarities with the consolidation efforts that led to the formation of organizations such as the Civilian Personnel Operations Center and the Defense Finance and Accounting Service.

"Unlike CPOC and DFAS, which are new organizations, the Corps was already here," Holmes said. "But this partnership allows us to consolidate certain engineering functions into one organization, with the goal of achieving efficiencies and improving services."

According to Holmes, the Rock Island District already performs nearly all of the functions that are performed by the Public Works Directorate. These functions include management, contract oversight and engineering support in areas such as the construction, renovation and repair of buildings, roads, grounds and other real property assets; utilities; snow removal; environmental compliance; historic preservation; janitorial services; and pest control.

"Now we will do them at the Arsenal as well as at other sites in the district," he said.

Holmes stressed that Arsenal was not ceding control of public works and would still make management decisions and set priorities in the DPW arena.

At the time the partnership was formed, DPW had about 70 employees on board. Nearly 90 percent of them have been detailed to the Rock Island District, where they will work in a separate project office under the district's Operations Division.

The other former PW employees will be assigned to a public works cell within the proposed Base Operations Directorate, where they will carry out the management and oversight functions retained by RIA.

No employees were displaced from their jobs as a result of the partnership. In fact, as former DPW director John Ruble pointed out, the vast majority of detailed employees are still performing the same jobs they did before, are still at their old desks on the first floor of building 102, and still have the same telephone numbers and e-mail addresses.

"We wanted to complete the transition with a minimum of disruption," Mr. Ruble said, "and we wanted to make it transparent to our customers." He noted that procedures for calling in work orders and reporting problems with services have not changed, and that messages would continue to be sent by the Arsenal's public works staff informing employees of bridge closures, planned power and water outages, and other items of interest.

During and after the test, audits will be conducted to determine whether or not the partnership is succeeding.